

A SHORT STUDY OF SATAN

Satan - the great opposer, or adversary, of God and man; the personal name of the devil.

The Hebrew word from which Satan comes sometimes refers to human enemies Psalm 109:6. *“Appoint an evil man to oppose him; let an accuser stand at his right hand.”*

But whenever this word is used as a proper name in the Old Testament, it refers to the great superhuman enemy of God, man, and good (Job 1:1-2:13). This use of the word also occurs frequently in the New Testament.

Another common name for Satan in the New Testament is “the devil,” meaning “slanderer” or “false accuser.” Other titles by which Satan is identified in the New Testament include “the tempter” (1 Thessalonians 3:5); “For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless.”

“Beelzebub” (Matthew 12:24); “the wicked one” (Matthew 13:19, 38); “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31); “the god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4); “Belial” (2 Corinthians 6:15), “the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2); and “the accuser of our brethren” (Revelations 12:10).

History. Two Old Testament passages-Isaiah 14:12-15 *“How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, “I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.”* and Ezekiel 28:11-19-furnishes a picture of Satan's original condition and the reasons for his loss of that position. These passages were addressed originally to the kings of Babylon and Tyre. But in their long-range implications, many scholars believe, they refer to Satan himself. They tell of an exalted angelic being, one of God's creatures, who became proud and ambitious. He determined to take over the throne of God for himself. But God removed him from his position of great dignity and honor.

Building upon this foundation, Revelation 12 sketches the further stages in Satan's work of evil. In his fall from God's favor, **Satan persuaded one third of the angels to join him in his rebellion** (Revelation 12:3-4). Throughout the Old Testament period he sought to destroy the messianic line. When the Messiah became a man, Satan tried to eliminate Him (Revelation 12:4-5). During the future period of tribulation before the Messiah's second coming, Satan will be cast out of the heavenly sphere (Revelations 12:7-12). Then he will direct his animosity toward the Messiah's people (Revelation 12:13-17). Revelation 20 notes the final phases of Satan's work. He will be bound for a thousand years and then finally cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:2, 10).

Satan's Characteristics. As a result of his original status and authority, Satan has great power and dignity. So great is his strength that Michael the archangel viewed him as a foe too powerful to oppose (Jude 9). *“But even the archangel Michael, when he was*

disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"

Satan's influence in worldly affairs is also clearly revealed (John 12:31). His various titles reflect his control of the world system: "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31), "the god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4), and "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2). The Bible declares, "The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (1 John 5:19).

Satan exercises his evil power through demons (Matthew 12:24; 25:41; Revelations 12:7, 9). An outburst of demonic activity occurred when Jesus came to earth the first time because of the Savior's attack against Satan's kingdom (Matthew 12:28-29; Acts 10:38). Another such outburst is expected just before the second coming of Christ, because this will bring about the downfall of Satan and his angels (Revelations 9:3-17; 12:12; 18:2).

Satan also has high intelligence. Through it he deceived Adam and Eve and took over their rule of the world for himself (Genesis 1:26; 3:1-7; 2 Corinthians 11:3). His cleverness enables him to carry out his deceptive work almost at will.

Satan's attributes, impressive as they are, are not limitless. His power is subject to God's restrictions (Job 1:12; Luke 4:6; 2 Thessalonians 2:7-8). The reins of God on his activities are illustrated by Satan's request to God for permission to afflict Job (Job 1:7-12).

Satan is permitted to afflict God's people (Luke 13:16; 1 Thessalonians 2:18; Hebrew 2:14). But he is never permitted to win an ultimate victory over them (John 14:30-31; 16:33).

A part of Satan's continuing ambition to replace God is his passionate yearning to have others worship him (Matthew 4:8-9; Revelations 13:4, 12). Since God has frustrated this desire and put down Satan's rebellion, he has become God's exact opposite. He is "the wicked one" (Matthew 13:19, 38), while God is "the Holy One" (Isaiah 1:4).

Satan's nature is malicious. His efforts in opposing God, His people, and His truth are tireless (Job 1:7; 2:2; Matt 13:28). He is always opposed to man's best interests (1 Chronicles 21:1; Zechariah 3:1-2). Through his role in introducing sin into the human family (Genesis 3), Satan has gained the power of death—a power which Christ has broken through His crucifixion and resurrection (Hebrews 2:14-15).

Satan's Methods. Of the various methods used by Satan in carrying out his evil work, none is more characteristic than TEMPTATION (Matthew 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:5). Satan leads people into sin by various means. Sometimes he does it by direct suggestion, as in the case of Judas Iscariot (John 13:2,27); sometimes through his agents who disguise themselves as messengers of God (2 Thessalonians 2:9; 1 John 4:1); and sometimes through a person's own weaknesses (1 Corinthians 7:5). He tempted Christ directly, trying to lead Him into compromise by promising Him worldly authority and power (Luke 4:5-8).

Along with his work of tempting mankind, **Satan also delights in deception** (1 Timothy 3:6-7; 2 Timothy 2:26). His lying nature stands in bold contrast to the truth for which Christ stands (John 8:32, 44). The great falsehood which he uses so frequently is that good can be attained by doing wrong. This lie is apparent in practically all his temptations (Genesis 3:4-5). As **the great deceiver**, Satan is an expert at falsifying truth (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

Satan's methods are designed ultimately to silence the gospel. He seeks to stop the spread of God's Word (Matthew 13:19; 1 Thessalonians 2:17-18). When the gospel is preached, Satan tries to blind people's understanding so they cannot grasp the meaning of the message (2 Corinthians 4:3-4; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10). At times he opposes the work of God by violent means (John 13:2, 27; 1 Peter 5:8; Revelation 12:13-17). He brings disorder into the physical world by afflicting human beings (Job 1-2; 2 Corinthians 12:7; Hebrew 2:14). Sometimes God allows him to afflict His people for purposes of correction (1 Timothy 1:20). **“Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.”**

Satan's Defeat. Satan is destined to fail in his continuing rebellion against God. His final defeat is predicted in the New Testament (Luke 10:18; John 12:31; Revelations 12:9; 20:10). **The death of Christ on the cross is the basis for Satan's final defeat** (Hebrews 2:14-15; 1 Peter 3:18, 22). This event was the grand climax to a sinless life during which Jesus triumphed over the enemy repeatedly (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). The final victory will come when Jesus returns and Satan is cast into the lake of fire (Revelations 20).

Strength for a Christian's victory over sin has also been provided through the death of Christ. We have assurance that "the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet" (Romans 16:20). But such personal victory depends on our will to offer resistance to Satan's temptations (Ephesians 4:25-27; 1 Peter 5:8-9). To help Christians win this battle against Satan, God has provided the power of Christ's blood (Revelations 12:11), the continuing prayer of Christ in heaven for believers (Hebrews 7:25), the leading of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16), and various weapons for spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:13-18).

Satan's Reality. Some people have trouble admitting the existence of such an enemy as Satan. But his presence and activity are necessary to explain the problems of evil and suffering. The Bible makes it plain that Satan exists and that his main work is to oppose the rule of God in the affairs of man.

Many wonder why God would allow Satan, this great embodiment of evil, to exist in His creation. No completely satisfying answer to this question has been found. Perhaps He allows it to show that evil and wrongdoing do not provide the key to the ultimate meaning of life which man so desperately desires. The true meaning of life is only discovered when Jesus Christ comes to dwell and live His life in and through us.

Because He said "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life."